

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAO PAULO 0152

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BR

SUBJ: MAGALHAES PINTO'S CAMPAIGN: VIEWS OF SEVERO GOMES

REF: RIO'S 184

1. SEVERO GOMES, FORMER MINISTER OF INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE AND PROMINENT SUPPORTER OF ARENA DISSIDENT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE MAGALHAES PINTO, TOLD CONGEN OFF THAT THE NEXT PHASE OF MAGALHAES PINTO'S CAMPAIGN WILL EMPHASIZE POPULAR MOBILIZATION, SINCE POLITICAL AND MILITARY SUPPORT IS IN TRAIN. MAGALHAES IS SETTING UP A VISIT TO SAO PAULO, POSSIBLE NEXT WEEK, WHICH WILL BE MARKED BY MEETINGS WITH NON-PARTY OPPOSITION GROUPS AND PERHAPS BY SHARING A PLATFORM WITH CARDINAL ARNS. THE CARDINAL, HOWEVER, WAS CONCERNED THAT ANY JOINT ACTIVITY WITH MAGALHAES BE JUTIFIED ON ITS OWN MERITS AND NOT TRANSPARENTLY POLITICAL. POLITICANS WHO DECLARE THEIR SUPPORT FOR MAGALHAES, SUCH AS SENATORS TEOTONIO VILELA (ALAGOAS) AND ACCIOLY FILHO (PARANA) WILL CARRY ON THE MOBILIZATION CAMPAIGN IN HEIR AREAS OF SUPPORT.

2. MILITARY SUPPORT. SEVERO STATED THAT, IN HIS OPINION, THE MILITARY OPPOSITION TO GEISEL WAS BETTER ORGANIZED THAN THE POLITICAL OPPOSITION. HE SAID THAT WHILE ARMY MINISTER BETHLEM
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WAS NOT A GEISEL SUPPORTER, HE COULD NOT BE COUNTED ON TO OPPOSE THE PRESIDENT. ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF ARIEL PACCA WAS THE ONLY HIGH-RANKING ACTIVE DUTY GENERAL WHO COULD STAND UP TO GEISEL. SEVERO SAID THAT WHEN HE DECLARED HIS SUPPORT FOR MAGALHAES (REFTEL), THE MILITARY SUPPORTING RETIRED GENERAL EULER BENTES MONTEIRO ALSO MOVED TO MAGALHAES. HE INFERRED THAT EULER HAD RECOMMENDED THIS COURSE OF ACTION. SEVERO SAID THAT EULER, WHOM SEVERO HAD BEEN

PROMOTING FOR THE PRESIDENCY, FEELS THAT THE MILITARY DISSIDENCE TO GEISEL AND FIGUEIREDO IS PROFOUND. HOWEVER, MUCH OF THAT OPPOSITION

IS IDENTIFIED WITH OUSTED ARMY MINISTER FROTA. "LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE MILITARY OBEYS A DIFFERENT DYNAMIC THAN IN CIVILIAN POLITICAL CIRCLES," SEVERO OBSERVED. HE STATED THAT EULER TOLD HIM THAT IF HE SUPPORTED MAGALHAES NOW, HE MIGHT ALIENATE THE FROTA SUPPORTERS IN TROOP COMMANDS. SEVERO SAID THAT HE INFERS FROM EULER'S STATEMENTS THAT EULER MIGHT STILL BECOME ACTIVE POLITICALLY WITH THE FROTA SUPPORTERS, HAVING NO WHERE ELSE TO GO, SWING BEHIND HIM. SEVERO SAID HE SENSES THAT THIS MIGHT BE OCCURRING. MAGALHAES AND FROTA HAD NOT TALKED, BUT HAD SENT FEELERS OUT TO EACH OTHER. SEVERO SPECIFICALLY STATED THAT MAGALHAES WAS NOT AIMING FOR A COUP D'ETAT, BUT HE WAS WILLING TO USE ANTI-GEISEL SENTIMENT IN THE MILITARY TO ACHIEVE HIS GOAL.

3. ELECTION MECHANICS. SEVERO SAID THAT CHANCES ARE NIL THAT MAGALHAES COULD WIN PARTY ENDORSEMENT IN THE ARENA CONVENTION. "THE RULES WILL BE CHANGED, OR PRESSURES EXERTED, AS NECESSARY, TO MAKE THE CONVENTION PRODUCE GEISEL'S CHOICE," STATED SEVERO. HE NOTED, HOWEVER, THAT THE PRESIDENT HAD LOST MUCH POPULAR AND MILITARY SUPPORT BECAUSE OF HIS BENDING OF THE INSTITUTIONS TO SUIT HIS IMMEDIATE PURPOSES, AND THAT ANY FURTHER CHANGES INVOLVED SOME RISK OF POPULAR AND MILITARY OPPOSITION. "IN FACT, THE BEST DEVELOPMENT FROM MAGALHAES' POINT OF VIEW WOULD BE FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO SMASH HIM ARBITRARILY. IT WOULD PROVOKE AN OPEN MILITARY CRISIS." CONFIDENTIAL

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SEVERO STATED THAT IT IS VERY DIFFICULT FOR MAGALHAES TO CARRY ON HIS CAMPAIGN AFTER THE ARENA CONVENTION. IF HE IS EXCLUDED IN SOME OUTRAGEOUS MANNER, HE CAN PROTEST, BUT HE CANNOT THEN TURN TO THE MDB BECAUSE HE IS NOT A MEMBER. MORE BASICALLY, MAGALHAES' CAMPAIGN IS PREDICATED ON THE REVOLUTION, NOT ON OPPOSITION TO IT. ASKED WHETHER FIGUEIREDO WAS AN ARENA MEMBER, SEVERO CLARIFIED THAT MILITARY OFFICERS DO NOT HAVE TO BELONG TO A PARTY IN ORDER TO BECOME CANDIDATES. ONE POSSIBILITY WOULD BE FOR THE MDB TO NOMINATE A MILITARY OFFICER WHO WOULD CARRY ON TO THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE THE FIGHT THAT MAGALHAES HAD BEGUN.

4. PROSPECTS. SEVERO SAID THAT THE PROSPECTS OF MAGALHAES PINTO BECOMING PRESIDENT THROUGH THE CURRENT ELECTORAL SYSTEM ARE SLIM. HIS CHANCES OF BECOMING PRESIDENT AS THE RESULT OF A MILITARY CRISIS WERE UNPREDICTABLE AT THIS TIME. WHAT ONE COULD COUNT ON WAS THAT MAGALHAES' CAMPAIGN WOULD FORM THE BASIS OF A LARGE NEW POLITICAL PARTY OF THE CENTER-LEFT (IN THE BRAZILIAN SPECTRUM). THAT PARTY - GIVEN THE LACK OF POLITICAL-MILITARY SUPPORT FOR GEISEL AND FIGUEIREDO - WOULD BE THE ONE THAT FIGUEIREDO MUST DEAL WITH AND WOULD COMMIT HIM TO A GREATER DEGREE OF LIBERALIZATION THAN THE REGIME NOW CONTEMPLATES. CHAPIN

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